

Message Text

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USDEL SECRETARY

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR US EG IS

SUBJ: GAMASY ON ISRAELI ACTION AGAINST AMOCO RIG

REF: CAIRO 11704

1. DURING MAY MEETING WITH GAMASY TODAY, HE BROACHED THE MARINER INCIDENT. DESPITE STANDING ORDERS TO NOTIFY MINWAS BEFORE ANY PETROLEUM DRILLING SORTIES ARE MADE, MINPET HILAL HAD FAILED TO DO SO UNTIL 1800 LAST NIGHT. AT THAT TIME, HILAL HAD CALLED GAMASY TO REPORT ISRAELI HARRASSMENT AND TO ASK THAT NAVAL PROTECTION BE PROVIDED. ASKED WHY HE HAD WAITED SO LONG, HILAL EXPLAINED THAT AMOCO WORK BOATS HAD BEEN IN THE AREA FOR "THREE DAY" WITHOUT ISRAELI MOLESTATION AND HE HAD THEREFORE ASSUMED MARINER COULD PROCEED WITHOUT NAVAL ESCORT. HE, GAMASY, HAD GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS TO SEND FOUR EGYPTIAN GUNBOATS TO THE AREA TO PROVIDE PROTECTION. TWO HAD COME FROM HURGADA AND TWO FROM SAFAGA. UNFORTUNATELY, THE BOATS FROM HURGADA HAD WAITED TO RENDEZVOUS WITH THOSE FROM SAFAGA BEFORE PROCEEDING TO RAMADAN FIELD AND DID NOT ARRIVE AT 304.1 SITE UNTIL AROUND 0200 THIS MORNING. BY THAT TIME, MARINER HAD ALREADY RESPONDED TO ISRAELI WARNING TO GET OUT BY 0100 AND BEEN TOWED TO THE WEST. GAMASY UNDERSTOOD MARINER FOREMAN HAD DONE SO ON ORDERS OF

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AMOCO AND EXPRESSED HIS DISAPPOINTMENT THAT SUCH ACTION

WAS TAKEN. GAMASY ALSO KNEW THAT HILAL HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH ME AND THAT I HAD TOLD MINPET AMERICANS SHOULD NOT EXPECT TO BE THE PAWNS IN A POSSIBLE MILITARY CONFRONTATION.

2. I TOLD GAMASY I HAD INDEED SAID THIS TO HILAL. I HAD DONE SO IN AN EFFORT TO GET HIM TO AGREE TO ALLOW THE AMERICAN CREW OF THE MARINER TO LEAVE THE RIG. I HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT MY SUGGESTION WAS IN NO WAY INTENDED TO CHALLENGE GOE LEGAL POSITION AND STRESSED THAT USG BELIEVES AMOCO WAS ACTING WITHIN ITS LEGAL RIGHTS IN SENDING MARINER TO 304-1. AFTER RECOUNTING MY UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT TRANSPRIRED LAST NIGHT, BASED PRIMARILY ON EXCHANGES WITH AMOCO/SANTE FE LOCAL MANAGEMENT, I TOLD HIM DEPT HAD BEEN MUCH CONCERNED AND HAD INSTRUCTED BOTH AMB TOON AND ME TO APPROACH RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS TOURGE THEM TO COOL IT.

3. IN MAKING APPROACH TO ISRAELIS, WE HAD DEMANDED THAT ISRAELIS HOLD OFF TAKING ANY ACTION AGAINST AMOCO RIG. WHILE THE ISRAELI POSITION ON THE LEGAL STAUTS OF THE AREAIN QUESTION DIFFERS FROM OURS, WE SAW NO REASON TO ESCALATE ISSUE TO A POINT WHERE IT MIGHT ENDANGER AMERICAN LIVES. ON MY PART, I HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH FAHMY TO URGE GOE NOT TO FORCE THE ISSUE AND THAT WE WERE STILL DISCUSSING THE ENTIRE LEGAL ISSUE WITH THE ISRAELIS WITH A VIEW TO TRYING TO GET IT RESOLVED. GAMASY SHOULD KNOW THAT, IN RESPONSE TO OUR DEMARCHE, THE ISRAELIS HAVE DENIED VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE CHARGES. THEY INSIST NO EIGHT HOUR ULTIMATUM WAS GIVEN AND CLAIM INSTEAD THAT THE FOREMAN OF THE RIG INDICATED IT WOULD TAKE HIM AT LEAST EIGHT HOURS TO MOVE. NOR, ACCORDING TO THE ISRAELIS, HAD GUNBOATS CONTEMPLATED ANY HOSTILE ACTION, EVEN IF THE RIG HAD NOT MOVED. GAMASY WAS INTERESTED. HE SPECULATED THAT, IF THE AMOCO/SANTA FE VERSION IS TRUE, THE ISRAELI GUNBOAT SKIPPER MIGHT CONCEIVABLY HAVE BEEN OVER-ZEALOUS AND EXCEED HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

4. NOTING ISRAELIS SPEAK OF A MEDIAN LINE,
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GAMASY ASSERTED GOE DOES NOT ACCEPT ANY SUCH CONCEPT. NEVERTHELESS, FOR THE TIME BEING, HE HAD INSTRUCTED HILAL TO LIMIT PETROLEUM DRILLING OPERATIONS IN RAMADAN FIELD TO WEST OF SUCH AN IMAGINARY LINE. AFTER RAMADAN, HOWEVER, HILAL IS TO GO BACK TO THE 304.1 SITE, WHICH GAMASY NOTED IS WEST OF EGYPTIAN OIL OPERATIONS ALREADY UNDERWAY IN NEARBY MURGAN FIELD. HILAL IS TO GIVE MINWAR 24 HOURS ADVANCE NOTICE TO ALLOW GUNBOATS TO BE SENT

TO PROTECT AMOCO RIG AGAINST POSSIBLE ISRAELI MOLESTRATION.

5. GAMASY EXPRESSED APPRECIATION THAT WE ARE CONTINUING OUR EFFORTS WITH ISRAELIS TO RESOLVE THE LEGAL ISSUES INVOLVED. HE SUGGESTED THAT I DISCUSS THE MATTER DURING MY UPCOMING CONSULTATIONS IN WASHINGTON. I TOLD HIM I WOULD DO SO. GAMASY ASSURED ME THAT WE WILL BE GIVEN ADVANCE NOTICE BEFORE EGYPTIANS ASK AMOCO RETURN TO 304.1 UNDER NAVAL ESCORT.

6. COMMENT: GAMASY SEEMS TO HAVE NO WISH TO PRECIPITATE AN ARMED CONFRONTATION, BUT IS ALSO DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN GOE'S LEGAL RIGHTS BY FORCE IF NECESSARY. ALTHOUGH FOR THE MOMENT THE MARINER INCIDENT IS DEFUSED, WE MAY EXPECT GOE ASK AMOCO SEND RIG BACK TO 304.1 AFTER RAMADAN UNDER NAVAL ESCORT. THUS, WHILE WE HAVE BROUGHT SOME TIME, IT IS DESIRABLE THAT WE TAKE VIGOROUS STEPS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE ASAP. AMOCO, AS REPORTED IN SEPTEL, IS BLAMING OUR NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE FOR THE INCIDENT, WHILE HILAL IS APPARENTLY CONCERNED THAT THE PREOCEDURE HAD IN THIS INSTANCE DEVELOPED INTO A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO OPERATE AND THAT THIS WAS BASIS OF PROBLEM. ISRAELI AND AMOCO ACCOUNTS OF WHAT HAPPENED ARE CLEARLY WIDELY DIVERGENT. IF MARINER'S FOREMAN'S ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED WAS ALL A CHARADE, AS ISRAELIS SEEM TO SUGGEST (TEL AVIV 6000), IT IS QUITE A PERFORMANCE. IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO CHECK THE FACTS, SINCE THERE WERE SIXTY-EIGHT PEOPLE ABOARD THE MARINER, EGYPTIANS AND AMERICANS ALIKE. GIVING GOI BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT, WE WILL WONDER IF ISRAELI GUNBOAT SKIPPER ACTED ON HIS OWN AND WAS OVER-ZEALOUS IN THE EXECUTION OF HIS INSTRUCTIONS TO ADVISE MARINER THAT IT WAS WITHIN ISRAELI CONTROLLED

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